



A Brief Visit to Northern South America

By David Gelston Nichols

In October, 1942, I made a business trip to South America, flying from Miami to Cayenne, French Guiana, and back again. On the way I spent a few days in Trinidad and in Paramaribo, Dutch Guiana. There was no opportunity to get into the field for any careful birding, but a few things did cross my path which might be of interest to members of the Audubon Association of the Pacific.

As we flew south over the Antilles, I could see White Herons in the marshes, but the only birds identified from the air were Brown Pelicans (*Pelecanus occidentalis*) shining in the sun, flying in a straight line close to the surface of the sea. The following notes were made casually at the several places where I stopped along the way.

Derby Flycatcher (*Pitangus sulphuratus*): To see a Derby Flycatcher in the United States one must take a trip to the lower Rio Grande Valley in Texas. In Trinidad and in Paramaribo they were one of the commonest birds. They would wake me up in the morning, screaming from the slate and tin gables of the shop buildings below my hotel window. In Surinam the boys call them "Krikibie", a very accurate representation of the bird's call (when pronounced in Dutch).

Groove-billed Ani (*Crotophaga sulcirostris*): Sometimes these sloppy, long-tailed, black birds with huge pumpkin-seed bills are seen in Arizona. In the vicinity of Paramaribo they proved to be one of the commonest swamp birds. Frequently they fed on the edges of roads and on the trail ditches which went through the swamps. Once or twice I almost ran over one with my bicycle, for they are very slow and clumsy at getting out of the way.

Roseate Spoonbill (*Ajaia ajaia*): One day I was lunching in a Cayenne hotel. The dining room opened out on a central court in which chickens and ducks were feeding. I lured a hen up to my table with a piece of bread. Other hens soon came running. Suddenly a Spoonbill popped out from under a table and joined the hens in sharing my luncheon. It was a very pallid, faded, and dirty Spoonbill. Its feet were thick and out of shape (probably the result of running about on the paving of the court). I could not discover where it had come from, but the manager of the hotel told me that it had been living with the domestic birds for many months. It ran about faster than the hens and was very adroit at picking up crumbs from the stone floor. It could not fly.

Black Vulture (*Coragyps atratus*): In Cayenne these birds were exceptionally abundant. They sat on the roofs all day long and dropped down into the street from time to time to pick up a bit of stray garbage. The Black Vulture is an active part of the sewage system of Cayenne, and the populace is very friendly toward it. These birds were much bolder than the average farm hen, so I thought it would not be difficult to pick them up. In this I was mistaken. Despite their lethargic appearance and a very clumsy gait on the cobbled street they are extremely alert and well able to maintain their independence

in the little crowds of market shoppers. They were always under foot; but never quite got stepped on.

Spotted Sandpiper (*Actitis macularia*): In 1937, in Alaska, I was surprised to find the Spotted Sandpiper one of the commonest birds. It was one of the noisiest and most conspicuous breeders in the river bottoms of the Main Range of Alaska. They are less common and very much less noisy when they visit the San Francisco bay area. In the vicinity of Paramaribo, although I saw a great many, I never heard one call, even when startled; their silence was remarkable. I saw them fluttering along irrigation ditches in a Surinam coffee plantation; and they gathered in silent flocks of from thirty to forty individuals while feeding among the Mangrove roots at the river's edge.

Swallow-tailed Flycatcher (*Muscivora tyrannus*): In French Guiana, not far from Cayenne, there are patches of Savannah land in the midst of an otherwise unbroken expanse of jungle, a few hundred acres of very moist ground with a thick cover of grass, with here and there a shrub. Every now and then a little band of Toucans comes out of the jungle and flaps its way across the open space to disappear in the jungle on the other side. The Toucans may be followed a bit later by a speeding fighter squadron of screaming green parrots. The ornithologist doesn't have time to focus his glass. He wishes his eyes could penetrate the tree tangle. Birding in the jungle is not easy. But as one starts to walk across the Savannah, a Swallow-tailed Flycatcher pops out of a bush, flies slowly to another one a little further away, lights in plain view, and presents itself as a neat and simple object of bird study. In habits and outward appearance it is very like the Scissor-tailed Flycatcher (*Muscivora forficata*) of our plains. When the birder from Texas gets a cramp in his neck from spying on Ant Birds in the impenetrable mass of jungle vegetation, he may turn his attention to one of these bits of Savannah and relax in the study of a familiar, obliging, and easily examined member of the neotropical avifauna.

Barn Swallow (*Hirundo erythrogaster*): I saw several of these feeding over the Savannah lands near Cayenne. They were in casual company with other swifts and swallows (e.g. *Iridoprogne albiventer*, *Reinarda squamata*, and *Chaetura spinicauda*).

Willet (*Catoptrophorus semipalmatus*): These birds, unlike the Spotted Sandpiper, were just as noisy and conspicuous on the coast of French Guiana as they are when they visit Mrs. Kelly on the flats of Alameda. They fed on the coastal mud flats exposed by the receding tide. When the flats were covered with water, they sat on the rocks which were above high water, resting, facing the northeast trade wind.

Black-bellied Plover (*Squatarola squatarola*): These plover were in company with the Willets. Of all the bird songs heard on my trip the least tropical note was the clear strong whistle of the Black-bellied Plover. Though the scorching sun of 5 degrees North Latitude was rattling on my white "casque colonial", this voyager from the North whistled a tune which made me forget, for a moment, that the breeze in my face was a trade wind, not a chinook.

Garden City, New York, January 18, 1943.



World of Wings

"Be like the bird,
Who, resting for a moment on a frail branch,
Feels it breaking beneath him,
But sings — knowing that he has wings!"

This free translation of Victor Hugo's familiar lines could be a theme song for members of Audubon societies during these months of tension and insecurity, when we need more than ever to keep in mind the countless ways of life that Nature reveals and that man cannot destroy.

To witness a flight of thousands of Sooty Shearwaters in migration over

the surface of the ocean; to discover the Varied Thrush quietly feeding under the garden shrubbery; to look up and see a wide "V" of Canada Geese flying high above the city; to watch a pair of Bush-tits building their pouch-like nest in the live oak; to observe for the first time a White-tailed Kite hovering in mid air over the meadow; to thrill to the return of the warblers during the May migration in New England; to hear the clear call of a Mountain Chickadee in the forests of the Sierra — these and innumerable kindred experiences bring new life and lifting power to our weary hearts, reminding us that though the bough may break we, too, can sing, knowing that we have around us a World of Wings where we can find Beauty and Courage!

—Dorothy Dean Sheldon, Berkeley, California



February Field Trip

Sunday, the fourteenth of February, found us in a new locality; a valentine from Mr. Harwell, who led the group to a birding spot he uncovered during the Christmas census. South Basin, long noted by most of us on the map, but long neglected as a possible birding spot, came through in fine style. The weather was ideal and we enjoyed almost mid-summer temperature throughout the day.

We first visited the hill overlooking Gilman Park on the bay shore and then spent the balance of the afternoon observing the shore-birds on the flats just north of the park.

A totally unexpected Prairie Falcon welcomed the group and set the tempo of birding which did not let up until we were bid adieu by an equally surprising Short-eared Owl. Forty-eight additional species provided ample birding for the gathering which was again split up into three smaller parties for greater facility of observations. Mr. Harwell, Mrs. Kelly and Mr. Bolander each took over the leadership of a smaller group. This plan is proving both popular and profitable with the encouraging large number of members and guests who have assembled for our recent field trips.

Thus we see that while the emergency has curtailed many of our favorite trips it has, at the same time, opened our eyes to such spots as this where we can find birds aplenty with a minimum of effort and expense. There must be many more such areas. Look around. Suggestions are always appreciated.

Fifty-two species were seen:

Eared Grebe	Western Sandpiper	Robin
American Egret	Marbled Godwit	Varied Thrush
Canvas-back	Sanderling	Ruby-crowned Kinglet
Lesser Scaup	Glaucous-winged Gull	Loggerhead Shrike
American Golden-eye	Western Gull	Myrtle Warbler
White-winged Scoter	California Gull	Audubon Warbler
Surf Scoter	Ring-billed Gull	Townsend Warbler
Marsh Hawk	Short-billed Gull	English Sparrow
Prairie Falcon	Bonaparte Gull	Western Meadowlark
Sparrow Hawk	Burrowing Owl	California Purple Finch
Killdeer	Short-eared Owl	Linnet
Black-bellied Plover	Anna Hummingbird	Pine Siskin
Hudsonian Curlew	Belted Kingfisher	Common Goldfinch
Spotted Sandpiper	Red-shafted Flicker	Green-backed Goldfinch
Western Willet	Black Phoebe	Savannah Sparrow
Least Sandpiper	Say Phoebe	Oregon Junco
Red-backed Sandpiper	Horned Lark	White-crowned Sparrow
		Song Sparrow

—Gordon Bolander, Acting Historian

Audubon Notes

March Meeting: The regular meeting will be held on Thursday, the 11th, at 8 p.m. in the Assembly Room, San Francisco Public Library, Larkin and McAllister Streets, San Francisco.

Mrs. Dorothy Dean Sheldon will show her latest collection of colored motion pictures of California birds entitled "Wings to You." Members and their friends will not want to miss seeing Mrs. Sheldon's beautiful and entertaining film.

March Field Trip will be taken on Sunday, March 14th, to the vicinity of Lafayette, Contra Costa County. San Francisco members will take the Greyhound bus at 5th and Mission Sts. at 8:40 a.m. East Bay members will take the bus at 20th and San Pablo, Oakland, at 9:10 a.m. The party will get off at Golden Gate Ave. (easterly limits of Lafayette). Buy round-trip tickets. Bring field glasses and luncheon. A bus returns at 3:25 and another at 5:25.

Members of the Natural Science

Section of the Sierra Club will be our guests on this trip.

Groups with leaders will form at Lafayette.

February Meeting: The 305th meeting was held on the 11th in the Assembly Room of the San Francisco Public Library, President Mrs. Harold C. Austin presiding.

Mrs. Junea W. Kelly, naturalist and lecturer for the Extension Division, University of California, was the speaker of the evening. Mrs. Kelly's lecture on "Shore Birds" gave the most graphic and significant picture of the feeding habits and nesting sites of our familiar shore birds, as observed in this Bay area and at Hudson Bay, Canada. Only one of Mrs. Kelly's rich birding experience, contagious enthusiasm and teaching ability could interpret so vividly the adaptation of various types of "feeding tools" to corresponding depths of the food supply of birds along the shore. Her lecture was illustrated by skins and by excellent photographs taken during Mrs. Kelly's visit to Churchhill, on Hudson Bay.

Observations

The following observations have been reported:

Black-crowned Night Heron, Chain of Lakes, Golden Gate Park, Feb. 6. M. V. Wolff.

Raven, Mt. Davidson, San Francisco; Mocking Bird, Grand View Ave. and Akron, Oakland, Feb. 11. Gordon Bolander.

Allen Hummingbird, Larkspur, Marin Co., Jan. 30. Mary L. Couttright.

Allen Hummingbird, San Francisco, Feb. 20. Jack Wolff. (This date for San Francisco seems late, but is being given because the writer has found this species absent in places where in other years it was seen in early February. J.W.K.)

Bush-tit nest, Alameda, Jan. 10; young about to leave nest. Feb. 10. Angelo Hewetson.

Western Tanager with band, Kent Garden, Ross, Marin Co., Jan. 18. Mrs. Otis H. Smith. (Mrs. Smith banded a Western Tanager in January, 1941, and this is probably the same bird.)

Shore birds in Alameda have been less numerous since the storms. Avocets are still here, Feb. 23. Junea W. Kelly.

Audubon Association of the Pacific

Organized January 25, 1917

For the Study and the Protection of Birds

President.....Mrs. Harold C. Austin.....541 Boulevard Way, Piedmont
Corresponding Secretary.....Mr. Joseph J. Webb.....519 California St., San Francisco
Treasurer.....Miss Ivander MacIver.....2414 Telegraph Ave., Berkeley
Editor.....Mrs. T. Eric Reynolds.....140 Estates Drive, Piedmont

Monthly meeting second Thursday, 8 p.m.

Assembly Room, San Francisco Public Library, Larkin and McAllister Streets, San Francisco.

Membership dues, payable January 1st, \$3.00 per year.

Student memberships, \$1.50 per year. Life memberships, \$50.00.

Members are responsible for dues until written notice of resignation is received by Treasurer.